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Holmes, FACT, VALUE AND GOD

Patricia Sayre

return of the human order to its ground and first principle, Thomas introduces the theology of the Incarnation, of the ecclesial community, and of grace and the sacramental system.

Hibbs puts together a compelling argument to show that Thomas composed the SCG for fellow Christian inquirers to show how them how they can and should situate their philosophical inquiries within the broader and more ample horizons of revealed theology and speculative theological inquiry. Christian life itself can be viewed as the pursuit of the same comprehensive knowledge or wisdom sought by the pagan thinkers of old, but now a pursuit with enhanced chances of success. The Christian inquirer knows by gift both aspects of the inner life of that subject she or he most desires to know and the sure path to contemplative communion with the same. The SCG is then an important protest against both separatist views of the life of philosophical and theological learning and especially against those views, such as the movement of Latin Averroism, in which philosophical learning is accorded a practical if not overtly theoretical superiority to its theological counterpart.

Not so for Aquinas for whom faith is a higher mode of cognition than philosophical reason since faith in his view is nothing but a share in the cognition of a higher reason—divine uncreated reason. As Hibbs shows in detail, far from isolating the philosophical from the theological perspective on what is, the SCG continually interweaves philosophical and theological themes, and Thomas frequently takes his reader from the intelligibility of philosophical theses to the intelligibility of scriptural texts. Philosophical dialectic is inserted by Aquinas into the narrative of revelation and instrumentalized by that knowledge-by-divine-testimony which is faith. The great accomplishment of the SCG is the bringing into direct interrelation the theological and philosophical viewpoints and their respective methods of exposition and inquiry.

To summarize the book's content, Chapter 1 of *Dialectic and Narrative* treats Aquinas's understanding of the relation between pedagogy and philosophical-cum-theological writing; Chapters 2 through 5 canvass the central themes of the SCG's extraordinary attempt at a systematic and general explanation of the coming forth and return of all things to God. Hibbs then restates and amplifies his case against the SCG as a missionary manual or work of apologetics in a handy appendix at the book's end. All in all this is a very perceptive and valuable study of its kind, one well worth careful reading and re-reading.

Fact, Value, and God by **Arthur F. Holmes**. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997. Pp. viii and 183. $18.00

PATRICIA SAYRE, Saint Mary's College

We live in confusing times. Eternal verities have come to look suspiciously like fictions masquerading as facts; rational justifications threaten to devolve into mere rationalizations; value claims appear all too

often to function as tools of oppression. We share no common ontology, no common philosophical psychology, no common religious commitment; hence it is becoming increasingly difficult to discover common courts of appeal for settling our moral disagreements. Small wonder that we more readily define our current situation in terms of old meanings lost than new meanings gained. Such is life in a post-modern, post-Enlightenment, post-Christian world.

Bringing conceptual order out of chaos has been one of the traditional prerogatives of the philosopher. In even the best of times this is no easy task, but when the chaos extends even to the standard tools of the philosopher's trade, the complications increase exponentially. When our disorientation is such that we no longer know which, if any, methods of reasoning we can trust, offering arguments and theories is of little use. Before we can begin to sort out our confusions, we need orientation of a more basic sort. We need a story about how we got into our current fix. In *Fact, Value and God*, Arthur Holmes gives us such a story, recounting in broad overview the history of a project central to the development of western thought: the project of grounding ethics in an ontology that transcends both historical change and human choice.

The first half of Holmes' tale traces the evolution of the Pre-Socratic notion of cosmic justice into the elaborated teleology of high medieval Christendom. As the story unfolds, we see how various conceptions of divinity—Plato's World Soul, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, the Divine Logos of Middle Platonism, and the Triune God of Christian theists—each contributed to an articulation of the ethical conviction that values are rooted in reality. There were, of course, dissenting voices along the way, and some of the more interesting episodes in this first portion of Holmes' saga deal with the struggles of the early church to resist renderings of the faith that undermined the notion that goodness is intrinsically present in all of creation. Eventually emerging from the various Christological controversies was a commitment to the convertibility of being and goodness that became central to the outlooks of the two most powerful Christian thinkers of the medieval period. For both Augustine and Aquinas, it is the thread that ties the whole of their thought together, guaranteeing a place for God as the ultimate ground for all that we are and should be.

Halfway through *Fact, Value, and God*, Holmes' tale of the pre-modern evolution of an all-encompassing teleology suddenly becomes the tale of its modern devolution. Ockham is assigned prime responsibility for this altered course; the enthusiastic reception of his nominalism went hand in hand with the emergence of a mechanistic conception of nature that drove a major wedge between fact and value. At first, this new non-teleological vision of the natural world was felt as a shifting rather than a loss of ontological ground. The Protestant thinkers who adopted the Ockhamist notion that morality is to be grounded in the will of God rather than metaphysical necessity of an immutable natural law did not conceive of themselves as abandoning metaphysics, but as offering a rendition of the moral ontology implicit in Scripture that had been purified of illegitimate Greek importations into Christian theology.

In a universe that is no longer intrinsically but only contingently moral, our sources of moral knowledge shift from the world without to the world within. Right reason and the capacity to respond to revelation, not the natural order of things, become our guides. These in turn are grounded in human nature, either, as the moral sense theorists thought, in an inborn moral faculty, or, as the empiricists thought, in other sensory or affective faculties which shape our moral responses. This already attenuated teleology is stretched even thinner by nineteenth century attempts to transform the study of human nature into an empirical science. Explanations linking human character to a divine source are in this fashion simply ruled out of court, and the very notion of a universally shared human nature becomes questionable. It thus is no great surprise when Holmes' story culminates with the complete loss objective moral reference that we find in Nietzsche's thought.

Out of this complex tale four basic positions emerge. The first, which Holmes calls the 'maximalist position,' is the dominant perspective in pre-modern philosophy. Although it is gradually eroded by developments in modern thought, maximalism does have substantial moments of resurgence; both Kant and Hegel, on Holmes' reading, remain committed to the project of grounding morality in an intrinsically teleological order. Kant situates the natural, or phenomenal, order in the larger context of a moral teleology in which "nature's overall purpose is human moral development." (p. 126) Hegel finds this moral teleology insufficient if limited to the willings of autonomous individuals, but transforms rather than rejects it, developing an account of shared history permeated by the purposes of Absolute Spirit. At the other end of the spectrum from the maximalist position we find Nietzsche and the moral skeptics; their position is characterized by the rejection of any form of inherent teleology. Between these two extremes are two further positions: the 'mediating position,' which limits itself to moral psychology as a ground for morality but still relates the psychological foundations of morals to the moral purposes of God, and the 'minimalist position,' which is essentially a form of consequentialism in which any link to purposes beyond those of involving our aversions and desires is severed.

Although Holmes concentrates on telling his story rather than arguing at any length for or against the philosophical options it reveals, his sympathies clearly lie with the maximalist position: "Its long influence in several strands of philosophy, its on-going fruitfulness, and its agility in the face of objections, all argue for its continued viability." (p. 174) But while favoring maximalism, Holmes recognizes that the other positions also have something to teach us. He credits Nietzsche, for example, with having issued a salutary reminder that there is no such thing as a view from nowhere; our attempts to gain knowledge are always shaped and limited by the concrete historical, social, and personal situations in which we find ourselves. Commitment to a perspectivalism of this sort, however, does not require rejecting objective truths about values. As human beings we can only access such truths by approaching them from human perspectives; but this is perfectly compatible with these truths having a reality of their own independently of the human

activity of knowing. Holmes thus acknowledges our embeddedness within a web of relations, but goes on to insist that if a relationship with God is key among them we must reopen the issue of an intrinsic teleology in nature. He favors (without here much developing) the Whiteheadean notion that ethics be grounded in a teleology of real possibilities functioning as universals. God remains free, as often are we, to choose which of these universal possibilities are actualized.

The die-hard moral skeptic is unlikely to be much moved by the sketchy hints for recovering a moral ontology offered at the end of *Fact, Value, and God*. A story is not, after all, an argument, and even those who agree that a story has been well and accurately told may draw radically different morals at the end. Even so, the way a story is told, as much as the events related, can often contribute significantly to what we make out of it. Holmes great skill as a philosophical story teller lies not in giving well-composed but static snapshots of the logical interconnections between one and another aspect of a system of thought, but in tracing out the manifold ways in which ideas develop and transform over time. The coherence with which his story unfolds is of a piece with his own deep conviction that "history...is not without continuity." (p. 179) Although the entire second half of Holmes' tale has to do with the modern unraveling of the maximalist position, the fact that the tale can be told with as much continuity as Holmes gives it suggests that we are not, after all, simply left with loose ends. Having seen so clearly how we got where are, we can hope to pick up the threads once more, reweaving the warp of fact with the woof of value, to fashion anew a pattern suitable to our current historical situation.

Arthur Holmes' accomplishment in *Fact, Value, and God* is to provide orientation as opposed to argument or detailed history. He presupposes some philosophical background but his book can be read with profit by relative newcomers to the field as well as by professionals; it will commend itself to anyone who likes a good yarn, spun by a storyteller who sees pattern and purpose even in what ostensibly might look like the loss of such. More optimistic than Alasdair MacIntyre and less idiosyncratic in the figures he focuses on than Charles Taylor, Holmes offers a timely reminder that while we postmoderns may be inclined to reduce intellectual moves to political power plays, the intellectuals whose movements make up the canon of western thought had a very real and considered commitment to truths that transcend our powers. Step back and take the broad view, Holmes urges, and you will see that our current moral confusion is also a product of our times and by no means our inevitable stopping point. We may temporarily seem to have lost our way, but with good will, effort, and grace, there is every hope that we will find it again. The story goes on…